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Cultivating the Wild Garden: Vitality and Environmental Ethics in *Paradise Lost*

Abstract
John Milton's *Paradise Lost* witnesses an ecological awareness informing its representation of Eden, where the wild vitality of plants gives Adam and Eve the chance to tend the Garden and to cultivate their household skills and social virtues. The article focuses on their different relationship to the wildness of the earthly paradise as an interdisciplinary subject that brings into conversation Milton's vitalist philosophy with environmental ethics.

1. *Historicising Milton's Environmental Ethics*

With the increasing popularity of ecological approaches to early modern literature over the past decade, John Milton has been considered a precursor to modern environmentalism.[1] Milton's emphasis on responsibility for the natural world is seen in *Paradise Lost* as well as in his earlier works. In *A Maske*, the enchanter Comus claims that nature is so abundant that to refrain from consuming such natural wealth would be an insult to its creative force: "Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth, / With such a full and unwithdrawing hand, [...] But all to please, and sate the curious taste?" (*A Maske*, 709-13). To counteract Comus's argument for human exploitation of nature, the Lady rebuts him by encouraging human responsibility and moderate consumption of natural resources:

1 Cf. McColley 2001 and 2007; Hiltner 2003 and 2008; Cummins 2007; Theis 1996; Pici 2001; Picciotto 2005.

Imposter do not charge most innocent Nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abudance she good cateress
Means her provision only to the good
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare temperance:
If every just man that now pines with want
Had a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion. (*A Maske* 761-72)

The Lady's response predicates a measured economy with an emphasis on virtuous and responsible enjoyment of natural goods and beauties; on the contrary, Comus insists on conceiving nature as a dynamic system of production, exchange, and human consumption. The two models are similarly addressed in *Paradise Lost*. On the one hand, Satan and the fallen angels advocate for the exploitation of nature, which they conceive as purely instrumental. Led by Mammon, the fallen angels violate "the bowels of mother earth" (*PL* 1.687), extracting minerals and precious metals to embellish Pandæmonium, "the high capital / of Satan and his peers" (*PL* 1.756-7).[2] On the other hand, Adam and Eve make several observations on their prelapsarian work and attitude toward the natural Edenic world. They permeate their conversations and prayers with the mindful consciousness of being inhabitants of land, water, and sky linked with God's living creatures – angels, animals, and plants. Moreover, they look at the prelapsarian environment as a place of vast abundance which requires frugality and careful management.

Milton's models of nature's economy evolve from biblical history. The book of Genesis, with its two variant versions of the creation story, provides two accounts of the relationship between human creatures and the natural world. In the first version, Gen 1:28, God tells Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth

2 Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature emphasised the popular analogy of mining and digging with images of male violence, assault, and rape of the earth's female body to represent a passive nature controlled and dominated by humans (Merchant 1980, 39-41).

upon the earth".[3] The narrative of human domination over animal and vegetal forms of life is legitimised by the difference between rational man and other living creatures. Alongside the dominant view of human sovereignty over nature, a second version is recorded in Gen 2:15: "God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." Although this second account maintains a hierarchy for which humankind is superior to the rest of nature, the passage implies reverence and worship in humanity's interaction with nature. From this version, "a distinctive doctrine of human stewardship and responsibility for God's creatures" (Thomas 1983, 24) would develop in the natural theologies of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

Paradise Lost collates the two biblical creation accounts in Raphael's discussion with Adam. The angel uses the language of chapter 1 to recount how God let man "rule [...] over all the earth" (*PL* 7.520) and records the words of Gen 1:28 when the Father blessed mankind and said:

Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth,
Subdue it, and throughout dominion hold
Over fish of the sea, and fowl of the air,
And every living thing that moves on the earth (*PL* 7.530-34)

When Adam recounts his own creation, instead of Raphael's concept of dominion, the first man deploys the narrative of Gen 2:15 to tell how God gave him Paradise "To till and keep" (*PL* 8.320). By reading Genesis through "a temperate view of the call of man to subdue, till, and keep nature" (Theis 1996, 66), Milton's creation poem ingenuously describes human labour before the Fall. The biblical creation story only relates God's commandment to work the land, without stating Adam and Eve's activities in the Garden. *Paradise Lost* fills in the gaps of the original Genesis account and envisions Adam and Eve's keeping and dressing the land in prelapsarian life, leaning toward a more responsible, custodial view of the relationship between man and nature. As a result of Milton's vitalist philosophy of matter, Edenic nature produces an unconstrained growth which constantly requires human intervention to control its chaotic vitality.[4] Prelapsarian work shifts from being a pleasurable duty or

3 All citations from the Bible are to the King James Version.
4 Eden's chaotic fertility differs from Satan's "explosive fecundity" (Lehnohf 2004, 35) as much as Eden's nature differs from Hell's landscape. While Eden's tendency to wildness

a play, as conceived in earlier poetry and biblical commentaries, to a necessary and meaningful task that harmoniously integrates the vital fertility of the environment with the dignity of human work.

The emphasis of *Paradise Lost* on prelapsarian cultivation as a purposeful, though not harmful, intervention in the natural environment, in which humanity and the natural world are fully integrated, is one of the aspects that has made Milton of particular interest to twenty-first-century ecocritics. Milton's conception of prelapsarian labour – with its rooting in seventeenth-century vitalism – has been placed in dialogue with contemporary environmental ethics that, posing a challenge to the exploitation of nature, aims to explore alternatives for a more sustainable and moral behaviour of humanity toward the natural environment. This relatively new interest in the environmental issues of Milton's paradise has also coincided with ecofeminists' rising interest in the different ways nature is appropriated by human beings, with a particular eye toward Eve's alignment with the natural world of Eden.[5]

When reading Milton ecocritically, however, one needs also to acknowledge the distance between our modern sensibilities toward the natural and spiritual spheres and his.[6] Although Milton's vitalist interpretation of prelapsarian labour fits into a viable image of the future, one that is conscious of the complex interactions of human beings with the living and non-living things, his environmental ethics is clearly rooted in the classical ethos of self-cultivation. As gardeners of Eden, Adam and Eve are expected to cultivate Eden as well as their inner paradise. Their activity in the earthly paradise mirrors the cultivation that they should carry within themselves by measuring unruly,

expresses nature's vitalist principle of continuous growth and change in the direction of the divine, Satan's unruliness generates his offspring, Sin and Death. Likewise, the Nature of Hell "breeds / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things, / Abominable, inutterable, and worse / Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived" (*PL* 2.624-7). The wilderness of Hell is a desolate place of despair, a "dungeon horrible" (*PL* 1.61), characterised by barrenness, confusion, and hopelessness. In sharp contrast to Adam and Eve's care for the Garden, Satan seeks domination over nature and his fellow creatures.

5 Eve has been pictured as the protector of the Garden, the *genius loci*, in McColley 1983, 25; Hiltner 2003, 36-46; Knott 2005, 74.

6 The present article builds on Leah S. Marcus's compelling discussion of the relationship between "Ecocritism and Vitalism in *Paradise Lost*" (2015), where she seeks a middle ground between ecocritical presentism and historical understandings of nature to explain the effects of the Fall on humanity's relationship with nature.

potentially dangerous, impulses and growing the virtues of temperance and choice.[7] Rethinking Milton's concern for prelapsarian cultivation of the Garden thereby means bringing into conversation the profound ecological import of his poetry with his historically unique relationship between nature and individual self-improvement. In particular, this study returns to Milton's vitalism to reveal the significantly different relation of Adam and Eve with nature. Because of Eve's alignment with nature, Milton represents prelapsarian labour as a complex interplay between place, gender, and moral state.

2. *Eden's Wild Luxuriance*

One of the most original aspects of *Paradise Lost* is nature's peculiar tendency to grow excessively since in no previous Edenic representation had there been such over-abundance. As a result, Adam and Eve's dressing and keeping the Garden is an essential occupation to control nature's chaotic vitality. Despite the uniqueness of Milton's vitalism in Eden's architecture, the poem is fully indebted to the exegetical, hexameral and literary treatments of Paradise. The motif of Eden as a place of fertility was encouraged by the Septuagint, which used the phrase 'paradise of delight' from Gen 2:15, translating the Hebrew for 'garden' with 'paradise,' and interpreting 'Eden' with the related term *adanim*, meaning 'pleasure' or 'delight' (McGrath 2003, 44). In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine describes paradise as "a most delightful place, that is, shady with groves of fruit trees and extensive too and rendered fertile by a huge spring" (*On Genesis* viii.4, 347).[8]

The idea of paradise that developed through Christian theologians merged the theme of *paradisus voluptatis*, the Vulgate version of the 'paradise of delight,' with the image of the *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden, deriving from the Song of Songs (4:15). Early modern visual and literary representations

7 Barbara Lewalski offered a number of sensitive readings of Adam and Eve's gardening as a dynamic process between place and mental growth (Lewalski 1969 and 2008).

8 Cf. also *The City of God* XIV, 26. Early Church writers understood Eden either literally as a physical or geographical entity, or allegorically. Ambrose of Milan (333 o 340-397), for instance, described paradise as the various virtues of the soul: "a land of fertility – that is to say, a soul which is fertile – planted in Eden, that is, in a certain delightful or well-tilled land in which the soul finds pleasure" (*Paradise* iii.12, 294).

of paradise turned structured walls and gates with intertwined trees and shrubs to enclose the Edenic garden, as in the paradise landscapes of Italian artists such as Tintoretto (*Adamo ed Eva*, 1550-1553), Jacopo Bassano (*Paradiso terrestre*, 1568-76) and Domenichino (*Rimprovero di Adamo ed Eva*, 1623-1625).[9] In Christian art and poetry, the happy garden included an ordered and harmonious profusion of plants and animals, a perpetual spring, sweet odours, and a balmy wind, all preserved in a timeless state of perfection, where labour was a pleasant exercise to deter idleness. Milton's paradise reflects many of the expected features of the Christian Eden:

[…] Eden, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champaign head
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
Access denied; and overhead up grew
Insuperable height of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm
A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher then their tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise upsprung:
Which to our general sire gave prospect large
Into his nether empire neighbouring round.
And higher then that wall a circling row
Of goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit,
Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue
Appeared, with gay enamelled colours mixed (*PL* 4.132-49)

Book 4 of *Paradise Lost* depicts Eden as a "lovely […] landscape" (*PL* 4.152-3), a place of untroubled pleasure and delight, bathed with the heat of a gentle spring day dispensing "Native pérfumes" (*PL* 4.158). Unfallen nature has the shape of an enclosed garden, surrounded by a "verdurous wall" (*PL* 4.143); outside the enclosure, there is a "steep wilderness" (*PL* 4.135) and a "savage hill" (*PL* 4.172).

9 Not rarely has it been stated that Milton's Eden could not have been created without having once looked at Italian landscapes and wild woods as well as their pictorial representations of the period: Demaray 1974; Allen 1969, 49; Frye 1978, 218-55.

However, the boundary between paradise and the surrounding wilderness is surprisingly porous so much so that Satan easily leaps over the enclosed garden to tempt the couple. Even within the Garden, nature is wild and tends to grow without measure, "Wild above rule or art" (*PL* 5.297). At the end of the couple's daily labour, Adam claims that the overgrowing branches "mock our scant manuring, and require / More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth" (*PL* 4.628-29). But he also assures Eve that their joint work "Will keep from wilderness with ease" (*PL* 9.245), while she worries that nature's "wanton growth" may deride their efforts by "tending to wild" (*PL* 9.211-12).

Overall, Milton's representation of the earthly paradise reenacts the prevailing artistic and literary tradition, though with an important difference: plants and trees grow with profuse bounty. Nature's wild luxuriance is to point out that Eden's perfection does not depend on static order and timeless beauty as it was for earlier poets (Evans 1968, 249). Barbara K. Lewalski explained that the surprising tendency to the wanton fertility of vegetal things involves "a redefinition of the State of Innocence which is a very far cry from the stable, serene completeness attributed to that state both in myth and in traditional theology. In *Paradise Lost* the Edenic life is radical growth and process, a mode of life steadily increasing in complexity and challenge and difficulty but at the same time and by that very fact, in perfection" (Lewalski 1969, 88).

Milton's alteration in the traditional portrayal of the Garden is very similar to the concept of nature embodied in the 1615 painting, *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*, by the Flemish artists Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens (fig. 1).[10] The two painters preserve the long-standing tradition of paradise as *hortus conclusus* through the expedient of the natural wall, and yet they also undermine the timeless perfection attributed to Eden by earlier artists. In their reading of Paradise, the happy garden overflows with powerful vegetation and a great variety of animals, including savage and exotic animals.[11]

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10 Rubens painted Adam and Eve, the tree, the serpent, the horse, and the ape; then Brueghel proceeded with the plants and animals. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) was also known as 'paradise Brueghel', because of the many versions of paradise landscape that he painted, such as his famous 1612 painting *The Garden of Eden*.

11 The novelty of Brueghel's paradise landscape lies in his assemblage of plants, trees, and animals, presented simultaneously as a celebration of the beauty and diversity of God's creation and as subjects of a scientific classification, adopting the methodology of Conrad Gessner and Ulisse Aldrovandi. Brueghel's commitment to encoding natural philosophy

Fig. 1. Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens.
The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man, 1615 @ Mauritshuis, The Hague.

Although it is impossible to say whether Milton was familiar with *The Garden of Eden*, the teeming fertility of his earthly paradise finds a visual analogue in Brueghel and Ruben's dynamic interchange between sensual human beings and prolific landscape. As Raphael descends to Eden, for instance, he sees how virginal nature delights by its innocent excess: "A wilderness of sweets; for nature here / Wantoned as in her prime, and played at will / Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet, / Wild above rule or art; enormous bliss" (*PL* 5.294-7). In *Paradise Lost*, the continuous and unconstrained growth of nature has an important implication for Adam and Eve's labour. Pruning and tending the Garden becomes an essential activity in prelapsarian life: Eden's profuse fertility makes the couple responsible for controlling the chaotic status of nature and thereby establishes a vital relationship between human and vegetal life.[12]

and scientific classification within the Edenic landscape explains the originality of his works, which functioned as visual catalogues or micro encyclopaedia of natural species.

12 By highlighting the close relationship between vegetation and man, this article does not mean to neglect the importance of animal life in *Paradise Lost*. Rather, the objective of the

3. *Vital matter and the Eve-Nature connection*

The wild luxuriance of Eden in *Paradise Lost* is expressive of Milton's vitalist materialism, a mid-seventeenth-century natural philosophy that permeates the creation poem.[13] Vitalism understood all matter as substantially unified and deriving from a single matrix of divine origin that infused to varying degrees its vital, animating force:

O Adam, one almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not depraved from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indued with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refined, more spiritous, and pure,
As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
Each in their several active spheres assigned,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportioned to each kind. (*PL* 5.469-79)

The spirit that exists in various degrees of matter does not remain unchanged but extends its vitality upwards, longing to ascend closer to God. In this dynamic hierarchy of vital matter, all created things have the capacity for self-growth and the tendency toward a gradual process of refinement. Nature's unconstrained growth in Eden is both an expression of its vital impulse and the sign of its necessity of refinement as a lower form of life: "Till body up to spirit work, in bounds / Proportioned to each kind" (*PL* 5.478-79). Using a plant metaphor, Raphael explains the ascensive process of matter by observing that the lowest creatures resemble a plant's roots, while more spirituous creatures are equated to the green stalk, then to leaves and, finally, to the perfect flower:

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article is to focus on the analogy between human beings and plants and thereby contribute to mark the importance of vegetative vitality for human cultivation in prelapsarian world.
13 Stephen Fallon (1991) and John Rogers (1996) explored the implications of Milton's monism and vitalist materialism.

[...] So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More airy, last the bright consummate flower
Spirits odorous breathes: flowers and their fruit
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the soul
Reason receives, and reason inher being,
Discursive and intuitive; discourse
Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (*PL* 5.479-90)

The ontological continuity in nature explains also the relationship between angelic and human creatures: angels can eat like humans but they convert "earthly fruits" (*PL* 5.464) to a more spiritous "proper substance" (*PL* 5.493), whereas humans can eventually aspire to ascend to heaven if they remain obedient, "from these corporal nutriments perhaps, / Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit, / Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend / Ethereal" (*PL* 5.496-99). All of God's animated creations may rise or descend on "the scale of nature" (*PL* 5.509) according to their moral choices.

Milton's vitalist universe reconciles the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the relationship between man and nature.[14] On one level, Raphael's description of the sublimation process establishes an ontological hierarchy which illustrates human superiority over inferior forms of life. On another level, Raphael's plant metaphor highlights the horizontal continuum in nature from vegetative to animal and human life. Despite human superiority over other creatures, Adam is not put at the top of the hierarchy; he is rather taught to act with humility and care toward the environment.

Grounding his vitalism on a "reciprocal and similitudinous relationship" (Sullivan 2012, 126) between man and vegetation, *Paradise Lost* offers an early modern example of the incorporation of place in human flesh and spirit, which is emphatically manifested in God's intention to "plant / A generation" (*PL* 1.652-53) in the newly created world. Adam and Eve are more than

14 For the vertical and horizontal models of vitality in *Paradise Lost* grounded on Milton's Aristotelianism as a response to Cartesian dualism, cf. Sullivan 2012, 99-129.

gardeners of Eden, since they are literally "planted in place" (Hiltner 2003, 1). The ecological value of Milton's vitalism to our modern sensibilities is to be found in the profound importance given to place in the creation poem, since "along with this idea of being rooted in the earth comes a deep commitment to place and to the Earth" (Ibid.). Being 'planted' in Eden, Adam and Eve are thoroughly rooted in the garden place not as consumers of natural goods, but rather a source themselves that contributes to the natural system. However, their contribution to the environment they inhabit is profoundly different and, from the beginning, Eve shows a superior connection to the natural world than Adam.

In the first depiction of the couple, seen as Satan initially views it, Milton insists upon the ontological analogy between humans and plants, describing Adam's "hyacinthine locks / Round from his parted forelock manly hung / Clustering" and Eve's "unadornèd golden tresses wore / Dishevelled, but in wanton ringlets waved / As the vine curls her tendrils" (*PL* 4.301-7).[15] In their physical description, the heroine embodies nature in a way that Adam does not: her hair grows naturally abundant and falls in "wanton ringlets" just as innocent nature is later said to flourish profusely (cf. *PL* 5.295) and, consequently, part of the couple's job is to control its "wanton growth" (*PL* 4.629).[16] In her alignment with nature, Eve's "dishevelled" and "wanton" hair symbolises excessive and independent fruitfulness. More significantly, her deep connection with vegetable life provides Eve with a specific type of experience: she knows the things of nature in a sensual and direct way, growing an integral understanding of the natural world. When she responds to Adam's speech about their "pleasant labour" in the garden (*PL* 4.625), she emphasises the harmonious mutuality between human life and their surroundings and, though posing Adam

15 Tracing back to classical and biblical sources (Samson is one of the most obvious examples), seventeenth-century English culture saw in long hair a sign of vitality, strength, and fertility. For an in-depth historical and literary overview of Milton's conception of hair, along with his sources, see Dobranski 2010.

16 The prevailing ideological framework of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries identified nature with a beneficent, nurturing mother, especially when used with a capital letter, "This power personified as a female being. Frequently as *Dame Nature* or *Mother Nature*" (*OED* IV.10.b). Until the mid-seventeenth century, the dominant vision equated earth with a living body by feminising nature and naturalising women, cf. Bruckner 2011.

at the centre of her universe, she nevertheless integrates him into the environment (cf. *PL* 4.635-56).[17]

Eve's alignment with the wildness of nature, while potentially empowering, proves dangerous when she decides to leave her husband and is tempted by Satan. As Munroe has demonstrated, Eve's equation with nature serves to reinforce seventeenth-century arguments that "women may have firsthand experience with the things of nature, but they are unable to translate that experience into quantifiable knowledge based on reason (an interpretive capacity akin to their male counterparts)" (Munroe 2011, 41). Eve's interpretative abilities, in other words, require Adam's reasoning as much as the Garden requires their pruning and tending to control its wild growth. After all, the woman's potential for unruliness implies subjection and dependence on her husband, as she acknowledges to Adam, "God is thy law, thou mine" (*PL* 4.637).

While a prelapsarian understanding of Eve's "wanton ringlets" reveals that women and nature are analogous in their mutual fecundity and yearning for improvement – bringing Milton's vitalism to mind, – a postlapsarian interpretation sees in the wildness of Eve's hair an expression of her uncontrolled desire and the anticipation of her loss of innocence. Milton's use of the double-edged meaning of *wanton* and *wilderness*, combining the positive and negative senses of natural abundance and lascivious passion, is well represented in Rembrandt van Rijn's *Adam and Eve* (1638), which depicts the moment of temptation by showing two fleshy bodies with ordinary faces and very wanton, dishevelled hair. Unlike the idealised figures and forms in the previous Renaissance artistic versions of the Edenic couple,[18] Rembrandt's etching (fig. 3) attempts to mark

17 Ann Torday Gulden sees in Eve's celebration of the "continuum between the macrocosm of their brand new universe, and its macrocosm, her union with Adam in the garden" an alternative vision that integrates Adam's scientific reading of the natural world. Their different approaches to the environment are a source of mutual thought and understanding in prelapsarian life, which benefits from Eve as the *genius loci* of Eden (Gulden 2008, 52). Pearce argues, instead, that the pressure of different ways of thinking about gardening, along with their roles in the household, generates a gap in Adam and Eve's relationship and, consequently, their fall (Paice 2021, 286).

18 Albrecht Dürer's 1504 *Adam and Eve* (fig. 2) emblematically reflects the idea of perfection in Eden, typical of Renaissance paintings. In his engraving, the two lovers are depicted at the very moment of temptation in a pleasantly elegant standing posture reminiscent of classical statues. The proportioned and measured bodies, including the curling locks of the couple, are symmetrically aligned and distributed. Eve's long ringlets are gently moved by a balmy wind, but they are not "dishevelled."

both the unfallen and fallen sense of their bodies. On the one hand, their disordered appearance hints at shame and mortality after the Fall, on the other, their sensual and fully shaped forms reveal their engagement with human desire and fecundity.

Fig. 2. A. Dürer. *Adam and Eve*, 1504
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 3. Rembrandt. *Adam and Eve*, 1638
The Art Institute of Chicago

But in Milton's poem the combination of fertility and lasciviousness is uniquely Eve's trait. By emphasising the heroine's intimacy with nature, Milton represents Eve as a privileged and authoritative repository of ecological sensitivity. With the Fall, human and vegetal life are no longer connected through similitude and analogy. When Eve plucked and ate the fruit, "Earth felt the wound" (*PL* 9.782). The quality of the couple's embeddedness on earth is marked by disharmony, lust, and wild confusion as much as their relationship, which is characterised by the negative sense of *wanton*: "he on Eve / Began to cast lascivious eyes, she him / As wantonly repaid" (*PL* 9.1013-15). Revising the nature-woman connection, Milton's Eve experiences the shift from mutual co-creation within nature to a paradigm of exploitation.

4. *Tending the Garden and Cultivating Human Virtues*

Milton's vitalist description of prelapsarian life, with its rooting in the ontological continuity between man and nature, unfolds an environmental ethics. Prelapsarian vegetation grows excessively, because of its ascendant tendency, and this requires Adam and Eve's constant activity. In this sense, human labour is necessary to control, refine, and elevate the chaotic vitality of nature. But the reverse is also true. It is nature's uncontrolled growth to give meaning and purpose to the couple's work. Rooted in the garden place, Adam and Eve's pruning and ordering promotes both an ecological and responsible approach toward the environment and an ethical model for the cultivation of individual virtues, such as conscious decision-making, household management, freedom, and temperance. Like the plants in the Garden, Adam and Eve "too are 'planted' by God, expected to grow and perfect themselves through cultivation" (Lewalski 1969, 93). As gardeners, they are responsible for cultivating Eden and their "paradise within" (*PL* 12.587), that is, their human virtues. What Milton uniquely does in *Paradise Lost* is to provide a vision of prelapsarian labour as an ethical exercise to improve the human relationship to nature and inner individuality. Consequently, Milton's creation story differs from the traditional notion of Adam's labour as either a prelapsarian activity to oppose futility and idleness or as a judicial consequence of the Fall.

Protestant theology had given considerable thought to God's command to dress the Garden, but only as an antidote to idle inactivity. The gloss to Genesis 2:15 in the 1520 Geneva Bible clarified that "God wolde not haue man ydle, thogh as yet there was no nede to labour." In his commentary on Genesis, Luther includes some kind of activity in Eden, but he also maintains that "labor est poena" (Luther 1911, 78), labour is a punishment for the loss of innocence of our first parents. Although laziness is deplored, manual labour, such as in agriculture, is regarded as a curse. John Calvin explains the necessity of cultivation to prevent Eden's inhabitants from falling into "inactivity" and life's passive occupations, such as "eating, drinking, and sleeping." God condemns "all indolent repose" since it goes against "the order of nature." (Calvin 1948, 125).[19]

19 For an overview of Protestant homilies commenting on Edenic cultivation see Almond 1999, 99-100 and Lewalski 1969, 89.

While Protestant writings placed emphasis on the importance of human labour in the uncorrupted world, hexameral poetry conceived it mainly as innocent leisure. Torquato Tasso's *Il mondo creato* (1594) follows the classic late-sixteenth-century fashion of the garden as a pastoral, ideal place and thereby omits any kind of work. In Josuah Sylvester's translation of Guillame de Salluste Du Bartas's *Divine Weeks*, Adam's work is performed as a dance "more for delight, then for the gaine he sought" and described as a "pleasant exercise, / A labour lik't" (Sylvester 1979, 2.1.310, 312-4).

Working the land was also perceived as the result of the Fall and agriculture had often a redemptive potential. The purgatorial function of soil labour is a recurrent motif in English Psalters and figurative art, conventionally symbolised by an angel handing Adam and Eve the working tools (McColley 1993, 50-1). The same relation between purgation and labour is elaborated in an early seventeenth-century book of spiritual exercises by Thomas Saville called *Adam's Garden* (1611), where the author presents spiritual meditation as a method of replanting Adam's garden.[20] But Milton does not merely associate labour and purgation; more radically, he makes human labour paradisal, since it contributes to the refinement of both human and vegetal creatures (McColley 1983, 121-3).

The closest representation of Adam and Eve as gardeners of Eden is to be found in only one case: the frontispiece of the popular horticultural treatise by John Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* (1629). The illustration portrays the couple as gardeners: Adam is plucking a fruit, and Eve is picking a flower (fig. 4). It can be no coincidence that in a surviving copy of Parkinson's work in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, an early owner, Simon Mannigham, transcribed the lines of Milton's poem (*PL* 4.623-7), in which Adam explains to Eve the purpose of their labour in the Garden (Morrall 2012, 317-9).

20 The full title of Saville's work goes *Adam's Garden. A Meditation of thankfulnesse and praises vnto the Lord, for the returne and restore of Adam and his posteritie: planted as flowers in a garden, and published by a Gentle-man, long exercised, and happilie trained in the schoole of Gods afflictions.*

Fig. 4. Detail. Title of John Parkinson, *Paradisi in Sole. Paradisus Terrestris*. 1629
© New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Milton insists upon the dignity of manual labour as a vital part of unfallen existence: the state of happiness and freedom is expressed through work with nature in the uncorrupted world. For this reason, much of Adam and Eve's early conversations evolve around their pruning, tending, and reforming the fertile and overgrowing garden (cf. *PL* 4.437-9, 610-88). The couple's labour serves as means by which they care for the material world and cultivate their conscience. Laura Lunger Knoppers contends that the role of everyday domestic tasks in Eden, such as gardening, preparing food, and hospitality, "powerfully figures the virtues, reason, free choice, and temperance that Milton sees as crucial in the home and in the now-lost English republic" (Knoppers 2011, 164). Domestic activities – from prayer to discourse, dressing and keeping the Garden, maintaining the earth, and entertaining the archangel guest – are ethically meaningful by promoting virtue and good citizenship. Moreover, domestic labours are ontologically meaningful. As Adam stresses, daily labour is what differentiates man from the rest of creation:

Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his dignity,
And the regard of heaven on all his ways;
While other animals unactive range,
And of their doings God takes no account (*PL* 4.618-22)

As with the gardening labour, Milton uses any domestic task in Eden to illustrate how Adam and Eve cultivate their virtues. Because of Eve's intimacy to nature, she embodies nature's excess but she also excels at containing it. Just as nature appears simultaneously "wise and frugal" and "superfluous" (*PL* 8.26, 27), she expresses both creativity and an ecological virtue of frugality. This becomes particularly evident in Book 5 when Eve prepares the "dinner" (*PL* 5.304) in order to "Entertain our angel guest" (*PL* 5.329), Raphael. While Adam walks to meet the unexpected visitor, Eve attentively chooses her ingredients "for delicacy best" and makes sure "not to mix / Tastes" which would be "not well joined, inelegant" (*PL* 5.333-5). Similarly, with the drinks, she "tempers dulcet creams" and, finally, she decorates the ground "With rose and odours from the shrub unfumed" (*PL* 5.347, 349). Not only does she know exactly what kind of ingredients she needs for the meal, but she also measures and orders each element with reason, choice, and temperance.

In preparing the meal, Eve demonstrates her high skills in household management: she knows how to gather and select the most appropriate food for her guest, as well as she masters the art of hospitality since she has perfect knowledge of the etiquette to be followed when presenting a meal. Adam has less competence in household management. As soon as he recognises the seraphic creature, Adam urges Eve to haste organising the dinner because a "glorious shape / Comes this way moving," then, he demands her: "go with speed, / And what thy stores contain, bring forth and pour / Abundance" (*PL* 5.309-10, 313-5). But being hospitable does not necessarily entail bountifulness, therefore, Eve corrects his husband that "small store will serve" since she will "Save what by frugal storing firmness gains / To nourish, and superfluous moist consumes" (*PL* 5.322-35). Eve's culinary frugality indicates moderate use and preservation of natural goods, while Adam is more anxious of accumulating food for conspicuous consumption.[21]

John Guillory argues that *Paradise Lost* engages with two incompatible economies of nature: one is sheer multiplication, the other is the real economy of Milton's Garden "not based on unlimited abundance and superfluity, but on the principle descending etymologically from the word fruit: *frugality*" (Guillory 1990, 78). Edenic domesticity is the locus of frugal living and tem-

21 For Eve's high skills in domestic household, in particular when setting the dinner, see Gulden 1998 and Tigner 2010.

perance whose focus is on maintenance and not increasing productivity, since the couple has already more than enough. Gardening is thereby a repetitive task that Adam and Eve perform with the purpose of maintaining an existing state by reforming or reconstituting it every morning:

On to their morning's rural work they haste
Among sweet dews and flowers; where any row
Of fruit-trees over-woody reached too far
Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check
Fruitless embraces: or they led the vine
To wed her elm; she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings
Her dower the adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. (*PL* 5.211-19)

Reforming in Eden means to prevent the threatening effect of nature's wild luxuriance to grow with such excess and superfluity to turn it into a "fruitless" and "barren" place. Paradisial labour, in other words, is not progressive, but rather it preserves the environment through acts of tempering. This holds true also for the cosmic "gradual scale" (*PL* 5.483): Raphael suggests that unfallen humanity would eventually have been raised to angelic nature, where man "be found obedient, and retain / Unalterably firm his love entire" (*PL* 5.501-2). The analogous tempering inclination applies to Raphael's advice to Adam on human learning: "knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her temperance over appetite, to know / In measure what the mind may well contain" (*PL* 7.126-8). In this sense, Adam and Eve's gardening and domestic tasks are an extension of their inner conscience, whose purpose is the cultivation of the virtues of temperance and frugality.

The violation of Milton's ethics of temperance concerning the Edenic environment and Adam and Eve's qualities lays the ground for their Fall. Eve posits to divide their labours (*PL* 9.214) as a strategy to control nature's excessiveness more effectively and for maximising productivity: "the work under our labour grows, / Luxurious by restraint; what we by day / Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind, / One night or two with wanton growth derides / Tending to wild" (*PL* 9.208-12).[22] Adam and Eve tragically error in attempting

22 Eve's decision and argument to divide their labours as a means of improving productiv-

to force progress through the division of labour; progress instead should occur naturally through a frugal and domestic economy of Edenic resources. With the Fall, Adam and Eve's relationship with the environment is marked by disharmony and promotes luxuriance in a negative sense, either through excessive consumption or idleness. Similarly, gardening is no longer a "pleasant labour" (*PL* 4.625), rather work becomes more toilsome, "the field / to labour calls us now with sweat imposed" (*PL* 11.171-2).

With the loss of the Garden, however, not all is lost. God sends the archangel Michael to announce that both Edenic vitality and the refinement of spirit will be supplanted by a new source of animation. Meanwhile, the Son observes to his Father that vitality will be now "implanted" through "grace in man" whose contrition will produce "Fruits of more pleasing savour" (*PL* 11.23, 26) and a far happier "paradise within" (*PL* 12.587). Not only does Milton's belief of vegetal vitality permeate his representation of prelapsarian life, but it also extends to the possibility of mankind's redemption. For the vitalist Milton, Eden can be restored through Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice figured in vegetal terms as a "transplanted" root to give man "new life" (*PL* 3.293-4) – but that would be another article.[23] Although it is easy to assume the distance between our ecological ethics and Milton's vitalist ideas of restoring the earth, the environmental concerns that underpin *Paradise Lost* are still relevant today. Milton's poem encourages us to take seriously the complex, if sometimes vexed, relationship with the shared habitat of the earth when appropriating nature – whether for productivity or a closer and direct experience of natural things – and to engage with both ecological and ethical responsibilities.

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ity is Milton's unique invention, see Welburn 2019, 524.

23 Joanna Picciotto's *Labors of Innocence* (2010) offers an account of practical efforts to restore paradise by tracking an ethos of *imitatio Adami* across seventeenth-century experimentalists and reformers.

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